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SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 25 August-3 September 1992
Item 6 (b) of the provisional agenda*

TOPONYMIC DATA FILES: DATA ELEMENTS REQUIRED

Report of the Format and Attribution Committee of the Place-Name Survey of the United States

Paper submitted by the United States of America**

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1. The Committee herewith submits the results of its deliberations and findings regarding data elements and their attributes. The charge of the Committee is to determine and recommend data elements or categories of information for use by scholars and amateurs attempting toponymic research. Further, for the results of any research to be sanctioned by the Place-Name Survey of the United States (PLANSUS), the information to populate the required data elements must be collected and recorded in the prescribed format.

2. The required data elements initially recommended will be:

Feature name: Free form, but upper/lower case in accordance with standard rules for capitalizing proper names;

Type of feature: It is desirable to use the broad categories set forth in the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) developed by the United States Geological Survey. However, since these may not be readily available, any designation will be acceptable and could be converted to the GNIS category if needed by the maintenance organization;

Location: The Committee debated this at length and concluded that while geographic coordinates are most desirable, any locative reference would be acceptable i.e. geographic (even UTM) coordinates; first (county) order and/or second (township) order civil divisions. Map reference or public land survey references would be acceptable;

Bibliographic reference. Standard bibliographic citation of the source in which the name reference was discovered;

Variation in form or orthography (variants). Includes any published deviation from the official or preferred name, no matter how minor or trivial;

Unique identifier. Must be universally applied, presumably by the maintenance agency. It is further recommended that the eight-digit identification number from GNIS be used;

Pronunciation. Some indication of how the name would be pronounced if more than one pronunciation may be construed. Any method may be used, but it will probably be rendered into the International Phonetic Alphabet by the maintenance organization.

3. The Committee recommends that the Survey accept these required data elements for testing purposes, and further recommends that it begin to collect and record data elements that will be included in the desirable category. Upon successful completion and analysis of a testing period (duration to be determined), this format will be adopted as required for the official sanction and support of the Place-Name Survey of the United States.